No. 74

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF
WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"I don't know as you have much to regret, Marian. Life out in the country is monotonous. Here in the city you can enjoy all the good shows and concerts."

R. of M. G., No. 79

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MRS. PRESCOTT was telling her story to Wayne and continued by saying: "There was a streak of iron sternness in Mr. Prescott which I thought entirely noble until I saw how narrow it could become under fire. Our boy had all the advantages we could give him.

"He was quicker to learn and much farther advanced than other boys of his age.

"I never bothered my husband with the details of raising the boy, except that we both agreed that he should have the best. We found ourselves quite wealthy about the time our boy was fourteen.

"I chose the most fashionable school where he could study and develop his brilliant mental qualifications.

"You don't know what all that meant to us, situated as we were on the edge of society and faced the problem of placing our son where he could meet young men and form friendships which would insure his position in life.

"My husband sent the boy rather a small allowance, considering his means, because, he said, too much money spoiled a boy and made him dissipated.

"Mr. Prescott always had an intolerant dread of our boy's becoming dissipated or doing something dishonorable. Once he told me that a father should have the right to take the life of a son who disgraced the family name.

"Our boy always came to me with his troubles. He never went to his father. And I couldn't find the heart to refuse him his requests for small amounts of money to pay for his schoolboy frolics.

"It all seemed so innocent, it was hardly worth while to bother my husband about it.

"And so I wanted my boy to make me his confi-

dante in all he did. I suppose, Mr. Prescott told you about our bankruptcy, Walter?"

The latter nodded.

"Well," Marian continued, "his family pride was always the thing uppermost in his mind and the first thing he insisted upon. So that the first thing he insisted upon, as we began planning our new life, was that the boy should be kept at school.

"He also insisted that nothing should be said to him about our humbled position.

"He did not want the boy to feel a sense of degradation among his rich friends because his father was a bankrupt. He insisted that it would be only a matter of a few months before we should be on our feet again.

"Then Fredericks came into our lives. I met him for the first time at a reception given in his honor by local financiers.

"He was considered to be quite a power in New York, and they wanted to show him what Chicago could do in the way of lavish entertaining.

"I do not know why I attracted him. Perhaps it was that I had a better complexion than some of the other society women.

"At any rate he paid me the most extravagant compliments and I could not get rid of him no matter how hard I tried. I confess frankly that I rather liked him.

"He was a distinct man of the world. He had all the little graces of speech and manner so dear to a woman. No matter where I met him in society, he always singled me out.

"Quite a few women were jealous and they began to make slurring remarks. One of them must have heard something about Mr. Fredericks' past, and the story was

spread far and wide.

"The slights offered me by women who had formerly pretended to be my best friends, angered me.

"To spite them, I gave Mr. Fredericks every opportunity to talk to me. I knew that he would not stay in our city very long, and our little friendship was bound to come to an end when he left."

"The financial crash which drove my husband into bankruptcy came while Mr. Fredericks was still in Chicago. The fact that we were compelled to seek smaller quarters did not seem to make the least difference to him. He came just the same and was more attentive to me then than he had been before. He had a strangely effective way to chase the blues. He was a veritable beam of sunshine.

"My husband did not like him, for he believed the ugly stories told about him. He regarded Fredericks as a sensualist and gave him credit for nothing else.

"My woman's instinct had told me not to go too far. Mr. Fredericks was a man to take quick advantage of any opportunity offered him by a pretty woman. But I thought there was something pathetic in his devotion to me.

"He often told me that I was so different from all other women he had met, that I supplied the thing he had always lacked—wholesome companionship."

Chapter 242

BLIND LOVE

MRS. PRESCOTT had paused in her story to take a long breath. So far it had been comparatively easy to reveal her past. But the unpleasant part remained to be told. Her soul shrank from being laid bare to the extent of showing how deeply she had fallen. And yet, there were some redeeming features about it all. Hers had been a tremendous sacrifice only a loving mother could make for an erring boy.

With her voice quite steady and even, she went on presently:

"Of course, my husband could not see this. His idea was that no man like Fredericks would take up with a married woman unless she was willing to grant him certain privileges. I had never met a man like him, and refused to believe anything of the sort.

"He was kind enough to offer to loan me money upon several occasions. He was so kind and tactful about it that I couldn't be offended.

"And although I refused him, it was only my pride which kept me, in the darkest hour of my life, from going to him for financial help. Then something happened which changed the course of things.

"We had told our boy not to come home under any circumstances, but one day he unexpectedly appeared. I had to make excuses and assure him that we were as well off as ever.

" 'I am glad to hear it, mother,' he said. 'One of the boys at school told me that father was broke, so I

hurried home to see about it.'

"For a moment I was thunderstruck, but I laughed him out of it, but I could see that he had something else on his mind. At last I coaxed him into telling me about it. He was unusually large for his age and looked like a man.

" 'They have been teaching me how to play poker,' he confessed. 'There is a strict rule among the fellows that all I. O. U's must be paid off before the end of the quarter. I'll be awfully snubbed if I don't pay up."

"The poor boy shouldn't have done it, but how did he know what a tragedy a few dollars meant to us then.

"I couldn't tell his father the situation, because he was blindly prejudiced against gambling, and in his worried state of mind I dreaded to think what he might have done to the boy.

"So I went to my husband with an excuse of needing some clothes. He had refused the same requests before when our boy had written to me for small sums.

"This time, however, I felt obliged to make my request more emphatic. Well, he gave me the money at last, but it was at the cost of many bitter words.

" 'I didn't know you were that sort,' he said among other things.

"Thoroughly humiliated I went away. He could not have said anything that hurt me more. A few weeks passed and our boy came home again very unexpectedly. His eyes looked wild and shamed. I suspected at once that something terrible had happened.

"My heart nearly stopped beating, because my only fear was that I, his mother, would be unable to save him.

"I did not have to coax him this time to tell me his troubles. He was too anxious to speak and too frightened to let the matter rest. He sobbed out his story, his

tear-stained face hidden on my breast.

"Some of the bad boys at school had persuaded him to go with them to a gambling resort which they frequently visited.

"Our son lost everything he had and found himself penniless. Then he pawned his watch and lost that money, too.

"In desperate financial straits, he did something his father would have killed him for, had he known it.

"He was the treasurer of the college baseball club, which had just received a donation of five thousand dollars from a rich widow, whose only son had formerly been a member of the club, and who had since then become a star player as a professional.

"Naturally, our boy had charge of the money. Pressed as he was for ready cash, he took one hundred dollars, hoping to recuperate what he lost, but fate was against him.

He not only lost the hundred, but went gambling mad and lost the entire five thousand dollars. It seemed that one of the men in the gambling resort took him in hand and helped to fleece our boy.

"Of course, he was in a panic when he realized what it all meant.

"The money had to be restored at once to avoid a scandal and arrest. I shall never forget how the poor boy cried. For a time I was unable to frame a clear and distinct thought.

"Where was I to get the five thousand dollars to save him from disgrace?

"I went to my husband's office and told him that I needed that amount of money to pay some bills which were overdue. He laughed at me and turned to his desk without saying a word.

"There was absolutely no chance to get it from

him. In my desperation I thought of Mr. Fredericks.

"He had offered to help me financially several times, so I called him up. He was very glad to hear from me, and he gave me every encouragement over the phone.

"He said that he would give me a check for the amount I needed if I came after it.

"Mr. Fredericks had taken a suite of rooms in an apartment hotel I knew very well what it meant to me if I went there at the hour he suggested.

"No man will give a woman five thousand dollars just because she is pleasant to look at.

"For hours I paced the floor in my room, trying to come to a decision, and I began to realize more and more that there was no other way.

"The hour Mr. Fredericks had set was eleven o'clock that night At ten I dressed carefully. I put on the only evening gown I had left.

"My husband had phoned that he would not be home for dinner which made it easier for me to get away.

"I was blindly eager to get the money for my boy's sake. It was nearly twelve o'clock when I arrived at Fredericks' apartment. I was numb to everything but my big trouble that night.

"He opened the door himself He conducted me into a sort of a sitting room, an elaborate place, very dimly lit. It seemed he had made such preparations as he considered essential for my coming.

"Although prohibition was in effect, I noticed several bottles on a sideboard and a metal bucket with the neck of a champagne bottle protruding.

"As soon as we were seated I began by asking him directly for the loan I had mentioned over the telephone.

"He smiled politely, opened the bottle of champagne and offered me a glass. I drank some of it because

in our society circle this sort of thing was quite common, and I had no school-girl embarrassment in such matters.

"What disturbed me was his evasive manner of reply whenever I referred to the money.

"Finally he said:

" 'You are not the only woman who ever came to me for what you call a loan, Mrs. Prescott.'

"I tried to make some frivolous retort to the remark. He replied by seizing me in his arms and kissing me. I drew away, awakened to his attitude, indignant and thoroughly frightened.

"He began to talk in a way which seemed to put a false construction on everything I had done in the way of making the appeal for the loan. His compliments were insults.

"He was drinking freely, and before long I realized that I had come here in this peculiar way and thrown myself on the mercy of a drunken man.

"I was ashamed, but I was too much of a woman of the world to raise a noisy scene, and I became too bored with the silly performance to continue laughing it off as an alcoholic joke.

"At last I permitted him to sit beside me and gave him my hand while he continued his vapid gallantries.

"Hour after hour was passing. I could not bring up my request for the loan without his replying with an implication that was wildly humiliating.

"Once, in my despair I called him a cad, then put on my hat and furs and started to leave.

"But when he called me back I remembered the desperate necessity which had brought me there, and decided to play it to the end.

"The hours rushed by. Mr. Fredericks, now thoroughly under the influence of wine, promised me every reward within reach of his great fortune. He candidly

informed me that a woman crazy for luxurious living would consent to anything.

"He was under the impression that I wanted the money for pretty clothes and I could not bring myself to tell him the real reason for wanting the five thousand dollars.

"I played him along all night. I was horribly tired and began to lose my sense of proportion.

"Well, it was five o'clock when I left his apartment. I was so distracted and wretched that I almost forgot the check, but he folded it for me and pressed it into my hand.

"That is how I got the money, Walter, and this is the end of my story."

Marian Prescott was sitting, her shoulders hunched and gazing blankly at the wall.

Wayne arose and walked over to the window. He returned suddenly and put his strong arms around her.

"You poor, poor mother," he said soothingly. "And for that sacrifice you lost your boy. It was cruel indeed, and my heart goes out to you in tender sympathy."

She buried her face on his shoulder and wept softly to herself.

He patted her gently for a long while. Finally she put his arms away and looked at him with searching eyes.

"Knowing all this now, dear," she said. "Do you still want to make me your wife?"

"Yes," he cried impulsively. "I want you more than ever, for I firmly believe as I have always done, that you never committed a wrong for the sake of doing wrong."

She held him at arm's length now, both of her hands resting on his shoulders.

"Walter," she whispered, her big luminous eyes gazing into his with an expression of intense longing. "You will never know what this means to me. I have found a man big enough to judge a woman mercifully. And I shall be grateful to you until I draw my last breath."

"But I don't want gratitude, sweetheart," he answered, kissing her. "I want your love—all of it."

"It is yours, Walter. It is yours."

Their arms were about each other and Walter Wayne imagined himself the happiest man in the world. He had conquered where others failed, and in the woman's estimation he had risen to glorious heights.

Chapter 243

THE UNDESIRABLE

THE MARRIAGE of Walter Wayne and Marian Prescott took place without causing the least ripple of excitement. There were those who shrugged their shoulders, and there were those who snickered maliciously. One of Wayne's personal friends even went so far as to predict a very unhappy life for him.

But Wayne had faith. Nothing could shake his faith in the woman he had made his wife.

He loved her with a patient ardor that was almost pathetic. As her husband he assumed every responsibility. He wanted to protect her with his yet unsullied name.

He was wealthy enough to afford the luxuries she had been used to, and after a short honeymoon trip he installed Marian in a pretentious home which was situated in one of the most exclusive residence sections.

And once more transplanted into the proper sphere, Marian bloomed forth like a rose.

She dressed handsomely and regardless of expense. Her every whim was gratified by the man who idolized her.

All of his wife's requests for money he granted with a smile, and he usually brought his check book out before she had finished speaking.

There were times when doubt assailed him, but he fought it off in his blind faith.

It never occurred to him that during the first three weeks of their married life she had not once mentioned

the boy for whom she claimed to have made such a tremendous sacrifice.

Yet, this seemed strange on the face of it. No mother with a heart could forget her own child so completely.

Marian knew the power of her charms, and her chief charm lay in knowing just how to be feminine. Her husband could not resist her sweet feminine wiles.

He was not tiring of her. That was her triumph. She knew how to play the game.

Wayne bowed to her every will, and it hurt him to see that she had rather a hard time of it in trying to re-establish herself in society.

As the divorced wife of Prescott she had been labeled as an undesirable by her society friends and associates.

The drawing rooms were closed to her and judging by indications, they were to remain closed.

While Wayne was not a society man and cared little for that sort of thing, he bitterly resented the repeated slights offered his wife.

She was slowly being socialy ostracized and even her lavish clothes and jewels, nor the fact that she was again an honored wife could swerve the issue in her favor.

So finally Marian decided to bring matters to a show-down.

She had handsome invitations printed and sent them to all of her old friends, announcing the date of a reception to be given at her home.

She made a careful note of every person invited, then made the most elaborate preparations.

The rooms were decorated with handsome plants and cut flowers. An orchestra was engaged for the occasion, and the usual liquors procured at a fancy price.

When the evening came Marian suffered a bitter disappointment. Only a few guests arrived and they had come to satisfy their curiosity.

Hiding her tears behind a smile she proceeded to make it as pleasant as possible for them. But the women appeared to be bored and exchanged much-meaning glances from behind their fans.

The men were different. Wayne was well liked and a good fellow. They were reluctant to leave even when urged to do so by their wives.

It was not quite eleven o'clock when the last guest departed It was outrageous. Nothing like this had ever happened before. At that hour the excitement usually began.

Of course, Marian was furious. She burst into a flood of angry tears.

"I'll show those snobs!" she sobbed indignantly. "I'll teach them what it means to insult me in my own home. And to think that my best friends should treat me like that. The men were decent enough, but the women? Those cats."

And having unburdened herself thus on the bosom of her husband, she dried her tears.

"You must not take it too much to heart, dear," he soothed her gently. "It is about what I expected. What does it matter after all if they slight us. We have each other and nothing else matters"

But it mattered a great deal to Marian. With her wonderful beauty she had formerly been a society queen.

And what use was there of having expensive clothing and jewels to wear when there was no one to admire them? And society functions had been half of her life.

For a few days after the chilly reception she was in a very quiet and thoughtful mood. She simply would

not admit defeat.

One night she coaxed her husband into her boudoir.

"Walter," she began, placing her soft arms around his neck, "I want you to invite some of your friends to the house and have a little stag affair."

"Why do you want me to do that," he asked somewhat curiously.

"I'll tell you why." She snuggled a little closer to him and kissed him. "It is useless to hide the facts. So far as my social life is concerned, I am locked out. I realize that fully. That is my punishment for disregarding the code.

"But it is unfair to you. You are the best and noblest man in all the world. I can not bear to see you suffer for something I have done——"

"I am not suffering," he interrupted. "I am perfectly happy with you. And could be just as happy living with you on a far off and deserted island."

Marian stroked his hair and kissed him again.

"That is just like you, dearest," she said tenderly. "I love you all the more for it. But as I said before, it is not fair to you. We are living among people in an up-to-date city and we are most likely to stay here.

"You are entitled to all the pleasures you can get out of this life. There is no reason in the world why you should not enjoy them.

"It is for that reason I want you to invite some of your friends. Most men like to play a quiet game of poker. They will come even if their wives won't."

Wayne reflected for a few moments.

"Well, who do you want me to invite, Marian?" he inquired, smiling.

"Make your own selection," Marian told him with a show of indifference. "But if you don't mind I'll ...

gest a few. There is Mr. Barnes for instance. He is a fine fellow.

"Then there is Mr. Winston and Mr. Ferris and Mr. Van Cleve. I could mention a number of others, dear, yes, quite a few others."

Wayne went mentally over the list.

He knew these men very well. They belonged to the most exclusive set.

When Marian selected them she did so with a definite purpose in view. They were the men whose wives had so cruelly slighted her by sending a curt refusal to her invitation.

"I might as well make it a regular party," Wayne exclaimed, fired by a sudden enthusiasm. "And there isn't anything I would rather do than play a game of poker." He glanced at his wife, then added: "You know the greatest pleasure of my life is loving you, sweetheart."

Her lips curved into a wistful smile.

"Ah, it was nice of you to say that, Walter. I do so want to be everything to you."

"Indeed you are," he assured her as he patted her cheek. "Now I'll make up a list and call everyone of them up. It is better than mailing invitations because I'll know at once how many I can depend on. Those four you mentioned I'll invite first."

As he rose to go, Marian rose also and accompanied him down stairs.

For the next hour Wayne was very busy telephoning. Most of the men he wanted were at the club.

Not a single one refused. Those he reached at their homes also promised to come.

Marian, busying herself with some books on the library table, heard every word her husband said and she felt something akin to a wicked triumph.

It was giving her the opportunity she craved. And she was getting ready to pay back the women who had slighted her.

The night of the card party came. All the necessary arrangements were made by Wayne with the willing assistance of his wife.

A party of twelve men were expected. The host intended to divide them into two parties of six each and play at two tables, and in the same room.

"You don't mind if I look on a while, do you, Walter?" she asked before she went upstairs to dress.

"Not in the least," he assured her. "In fact, I want you to. And I want you to look your best. Then you might wait on the boys a bit. They'll want a drink now and then, and something to smoke."

Marian's eyes sparkled. It was just what she wanted.

"I'll be glad to play the waitress to your friends," she responded.

She gave her husband furtive glance, kissed him hurriedly, and ran from the room. With the help of her maid she selected the most becoming evening gown in her wardrobe.

It was a wonderful creation of lavender silk which accentuated her beauty and charm.

It was cut rather low, exposing her finely molded arms and shoulders. She made indeed a lovely picture as she stood before the mirror fully dressed.

From downstairs came the sound of men's voices. She recognized that of Mr. Van Cleve above the others. It was a deep, rich baritone.

A peculiar smile flitted across her flushed face.

Going to the head of the stairs she heard her husband talking. All the invited guests had arrived, and he was dividing them into two groups.

She did not go down until they were seated and play had begun.

When she finally made her appearance she created somewhat of a sensation. All eyes were upon her in an instant. What she read in some of them was exactly what she expected.

"My wife, gentlemen," Wayne said proudly as he rose. "I think all of you know her."

Every man rose and bowed courteously.

There wasn't one among them who had not known the beautiful Mrs. Prescott. And they were apparently all glad to meet her again as Mrs. Wayne.

"I shall play the interested onlooker to-night," she said, looking from one to the other. "To some of you I will bring luck, and to some financial reverses. That is the game, you know. You can't all hope to win."

"Win or lose, I'll feel well repaid for being privileged to gaze upon so charming a hostess, "Mr. Van Cleve spoke up.

Marian flashed him a smile.

"You base flatterer," she responded. "For that you shall lose."

At a sign from her husband she served a round of drinks, then passed the cigars.

In every man's look she detected admiration, and she was happy.

Then play began in earnest. Marian walked from chair to chair sometimes advising, sometimes criticizing, but she was welcomed everywhere. She had a quick answer for things said to her.

For a long moment she stood behind Mr. Van Cleve, who won one pot after another.

"You are bringing me luck, Mrs. Wayne," the winner cried. "I'll engage you for the rest of the evening to stand back of my chair, and I'll divide the winnings with

you."

"Now don't be selfish," Mr. Barnes chided good-naturedly. "I would like to have Mrs. Wayne stand in back of me for a few minutes."

"I will," she replied, moving over.

And strangely enough, the luck shifted to Mr. Barnes. Then the man seated next to him pleaded for a chance. He got it.

Marian treated them all alike. When she was not serving drinks, she stood in back of someone's chair with always the same result.

She was very much in demand. At last she went to her husband who had been losing steadily.

His luck turned at once. He won four big pots in succession.

"That will do, Marian," he smiled at her. "You will have to move on or these gentlemen might suspect that I invited them for the purpose of winning their money."

This was greeted with cries of protest from the guests.

"If she brings you luck I want to lose," exclaimed one of them.

"So do I," echoed another.

"So do I," cried a third.

"No, I must play fair with all of you," she replied with a charming smile. "If I don't you'll never come back."

"Yes, we will," they chorused.

Chapter 244

MARIAN'S REVENGE

MRS. WAYNE brought another round of drinks and what had begun as a quiet game soon changed into noisy gambling. They were all men who could afford to lose money. What mattered that now? There was a lovely woman always ready to soothe the loser.

And several of them were quite willing to lose in order to get one of Marian's sympathetic smiles.

Far past midnight they played. Mrs. Wayne might have retired, but she didn't. She knew that a man under the influence of liquor looks at a woman through rose-colored glasses.

She wanted them to remember how beautiful she was. When the game was about to break up, she bid them all good-night.

In parting they drank a toast to her. They slapped her husband on the back and told him how lucky he was in having a wife who would allow men to get together in her home as she had done to-night.

Of course, Wayne was pleased. His wife was being lionized by the very men whose wives had snubbed her.

Marian, already in her boudoir, heard her husband and his friends singing. And as she listened she caught the words:

"For she is a jolly good fellow."

They were having the time of their lives and that was what she wanted. The stag party had been an immense success, and a very agreeable success.

And it mattered not what her own sex thought of her. She had become popular with the men.

Two weeks later came the annual charity ball. It was an affair no one cared to miss.

And it was an occasion when society women gathered adorned with silks and satins, for the purpose of inspecting each other.

Every woman who was anything or anybody came to see and to be seen.

Wayne had attended one of these balls and left in disgust. And he had no desire to mingle again with what he termed in his own words: "a herd of peacocks."

But he went because Marian coaxed him.

And Marian was anxious to go because this was her opportunity to pay back those who had treated her with such insulting indifference.

In this she succeeded beyond her fondest hopes.

Arrayed in all her splendor, she outshone all other women present. Her natural beauty, enhanced by clothing and jewels that cost a fortune, created a sensation.

The moment she arrived on the arm of her husband, she was surrounded by an admiring crowd of men, all clamoring for a dance.

Most persistent among them was Mr. Van Cleve, Mr. Barnes and Mr. Ferris. These were the men whose wives were recognized as the leaders of society.

Wayne had just reason to be proud of his wife. It looked as if the ball was being given in her honor.

He was not jealous when his lovely wife was unceremoniously taken away from him.

Neither did he object when Mr. Van Cleve disappeared with Marian and was gone for nearly an hour. He had faith in her, yes, blind faith.

Men neglected their own wives to pay homage to a woman who had been regarded as an undesirable.

As for Marian, she was in her glory. There was a constant flush on her soft cheeks and a triumphant gleam in her luminous eyes. This was her inning, and she fully intended to make the best of it.

She was drawing fire from her own sex. She was being criticized and slandered anew on every side.

Once, while dancing with Mr. Van Cleve, she passed a group of society matrons, and heard a few words the average woman would have hotly resented then and there. But not so Marian.

To her this was merely another indication of the completeness of her triumph.

So while she became the center of attraction with the men, she also was the most cordially hated woman.

Marian had a good reason why she singled out Mr. Van Cleve. He was the richest man in the city and the most prominent. And his wife was her worst enemy.

While Mr. Van Cleve was generally regarded as a man of honor who never lost his decorum, it seemed, however, that his conduct to-night deserved some averse criticism.

He had become fascinated with Mrs. Wayne's irresistible beauty, and her smile held a challenge he accepted without considering the consequences.

After the ball was over Wayne took his wife from Mr. Van Cleve. And it was done in a manner which betrayed impatience.

On the way home he chided her gently, but Marian laughed.

"You needn't worry about Van Cleve, dear," she told him. "He is nothing to me. I saw a chance to get even with his wife for insulting me, and I believe, I succeeded. If looks would kill, I would have dropped dead to-night."

Wayne was satisfied with this explanation, but

Marian had not been entirely truthful.

His wife had ben fired with a new ambition. She was determined to fight her way back into society no matter what the cost.

To her Mr. Van Cleve was only a stepping stone.

The Van Cleves had quite a wordy battle as soon as they arrived home. Mrs. Van Cleve was furious in her denunciation of Marian.

She even went so far as to intimate that the latter was deliberately trying to draw her husband into her net.

"You know what she is," she cried, her face white with anger. "If she was a decent woman Mr. Prescott would never have divorced her."

Van Cleve remained silent. What his thoughts were so far as the beautiful Mrs. Wayne was concerned, he could not express within his wife's hearing.

When a few days later Wayne received a telephone call from Van Cleve asking him to dine with him at the club, he was elated.

Marian urged him to cultivate Van Cleve. In fact she seemed a trifle over-anxious. Wayne, aware of this, smiled in his usual indulgent manner.

"It was nice of him to invite me," he said somewhat thoughtfully. "I suppose we will have to reciprocate."

"That would be the proper thing to do, dear," his wife agreed. "But I would rather have you invite him here. We could have a really nice time together, just the three of us."

And Wayne did as his wife suggested.

He spent a very pleasant evening with Van Cleve at the club, and asked him to take dinner at his house three days later.

"I would like to have you bring Mrs. Van Cleve."

he said.

"My wife has been feeling bad for the past week," the other announced somewhat frigidly. "She is under the care of our family physician. I don't think I can bring her."

Quite satisfied with this explanation, Wayne extended his hand which Van Cleve shook heartily.

On his way home he reflected a great deal. And for the first time the thought struck him.

Marian and he had been married nearly two months now, and she had never mentioned a single word about her boy for whose sake she claimed to have made such a tremendous sacrifice.

He found himself wondering if the story she had told him was really true. Was he after all to believe what Mr. Prescott had told him?

His own observation inclined him to the latter, for Marian was spending unheard of sums for clothes and jewelry.

Could it be possible that she had debased herself because of her wild desire to gratify her vanity?

It has been said that doubt is a sister to suspicion. Wayne was fighting off suspicion, but it always came back, taking a firmer hold.

He shook himself and his face grew stern.

"No, I must not even think it," he muttered to himself. "If I lose faith in her our happiness will crash. I must keep faith—I must."

So Wayne clung to his faith, although unseen forces were conspiring to destroy it.

He loved his beautiful wife with all his heart and soul. He loved her so much that he would a thousand times rather see her dead than have her kill his faith in her.

When he arrived home, he went to her boudoir. A

was dimly lighted. Marian was soundly asleep.

He tip-toed close to the bed. He had never seen her look more entrancing as she lay there now.

Her wealth of dark hair on the white pillow, made a handsome frame for her lovely features.

Her soft, round cheeks glowed with health, and her red lips were slightly parted as if to curl into a smile.

The outlines of her beautiful figure were discernible as the silk coverlet clung to it almost lovingly. Her one bare arm was flung above her head, while the other rested on her bosom.

Wayne stood there contemplating her in silence, the wildest emotions sweeping through him.

But he kept himself under control and left the room as silently as he had come. He carried the wonderful picture he had seen with him into his dreams.

The following day, Wayne had occasion to meet many of his friends at the club, where he always took his noon lnuch.

He was rather surprised to learn that they knew about him having invited Van Cleve to dinner.

"Did you ask him or your wife?" one of them questioned daringly.

For a moment Wayne was at a loss what to answer. A sudden wave of color surged into his face.

"I invited him, if that information satisfies your curiosity," he said at last with a tremor in his voice. "And I would suggest that you use more tact in the future when speaking of matters concerning Mrs. Wayne and myself."

The other took the rebuke with a peculiar smile and turned away.

That afternoon Wayne found his office very unattractive. He could not confine his thoughts to the bus-

ness at hand because they insistently strayed along forbidden paths.

The remark made at the club worried him not a little. What did it mean?

Was it an indication that his wife was being discussed by his friends? And was it being taken for granted that the relations between her and Van Cleve were questionable?

But before his mind became immersed in the slough of black suspicion, his faith came to the rescue. Marian was a good woman, and he would not believe anything else.

The dinner at which Van Cleve was the only guest, proved to be a very pleasant affair.

Marian was at her best. As her husband studied her he thought that he had never seen her look more lovely.

Her repartee and wit were sparkling and she showed her brilliant mental attainments as she had never done before.

Wayne's heart swelled with pride.

Van Cleve seemed to be amazed. But part of his amazement was due to the woman's very decollete gown which displayed her physical perfections almost shamelessly.

Wayne caught his eyes several times as they stole openly admiring glances at his wife.

However, it never occurred to him that Van Cleve might be in love with Marian. Neither did he suspect that his wife had secretly planned to draw Van Cleve into the same net into which he himself had fallen.

With characteristic tenacity he clung to his faith —his blind, foolish faith.

While he realized that Marian made a too frequent and too liberal use of her eyes, she was no worse in that

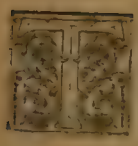
respect than a good many other women he knew.

All of them enjoyed admiration. And all of them became guilty of carrying on a mild flirtation now and then.

So far as Van Cleve was concerned, he resolved not to worry. But way down in his uneasy soul he decided to watch Marian a little closer when in the company of that man.

Chapter 245

ON THE TRAIL



HE NEWSPAPERS of Miami, the fashionable southern sea resort, created a sensation by printing an article which stated that a deliberate attempt had been made to poison Miss Marie Desmond, the governess of Mr. Philip Gordon's two children of Chicago.

The police were busy trying to unravel the mystery and find a trace of the man who had signed himself as "James Gregg, care of the Miami Hotel".

In her room at the cottage lay Marie, listless and wan. Only heroic efforts of two physicians had snatched her from the jaw of death. Grouped around her were the faithful Annie and the two children.

Harry was on one side of the bed, and little Phyllis at the other. Each held one of her hands, and they were watching her with anxious eyes.

"The doctor said you would get well again," said the boy softly as he caressed the hand he was holding. "I hope they find the bad man who sent you that candy."

Marie smiled in spite of the effort it cost her. Of course, she would get well again.

There was not the least question about that in her mind. But she doubted that the man who sent he poisonous candy would ever be found. In fac she knew it!

The letter which came with the candy had been written on familiar, perfumed stationery. And this had betrayed the sender, Marie was positive.

Alice had chosen that despicable method to remove her for good. Marie figured that blind hatred and in-

tense jealousy were the motive for the crime.

This surmise was correct. But she did not know that Alice, when her car struck little Phyllis, had recognized in her the first Mrs. Phillip Gordon.

Neither had she the least idea that Alice's main reason had been self-protection.

But whatever the motives behind the attempted murder, Marie was glad to be alive.

Within another week the effect of the poison would wear off completely, and she meant to take precious good care that a thing like that should not happen again.

She might have gone to the police and voiced her suspicions. Dread of the scandal which would be sure to follow, restrained her.

But her main consideration was for Phil and the children.

They must never know how low a wife and stepmother could fall.

And besides, it would leave the disagreeable suggestion that Mrs. Alice Gordon might have had some reason for wishing the beautiful governess of her husband's children out of the way.

Even before conscience left her after eating one piece of the poisoned chocolate, Marie had begged Annie not to send for Phil unless the worst came to pass.

But in this case she reckoned without the fact that certain bits of news coming from a fashionable place like Miami, Florida, are copied by newspapers of other cities.

The element of mystery connected with it, made the attempted poisoning of Miss Desmond a news story that all people the country over like to read.

Gordon, always looking for news printed in the society column, always scrutiniztd the page which mentioned Miami and the doings of the people there.

He was more angry than amazed when he read that Miss Desmond's life had been endangered by this mysterious assassin who called himself James Gregg.

Why had not the governess wired him at once? And if she was not able to do it, why had she not ordered Annie to do so?

Within three hours he was on the way to the southern sea resort. And he did a lot of thinking before he reached his destination.

Somehow he could not help connecting Alice with the affair. He had not seen her again since they met at the home of Mr. Shields. Here and there he had picked up various rumors.

One stated that she was again associating with the fast set, and that George Lorimer had become very much interested in her.

Phil knew from experience what kind of a man Lorimer was. He was of the idle rich cursed with too much money, and he had little respect for women in general.

By the time Gordon reached Miami, he formed his own conclusions.

The taxi which carried him to the cottage seemed slower than an old horse-drawn vehicle.

It was toward evening that he ran up the graveled path and rang the door-bell violently.

Annie came to the door, and she gasped with surprise when she saw Phil.

"Why, Mr. Gordon!" she exclaimed. "We did not——"

"How is Miss Desmond?" he cut in. "And the children?"

"The children are upstairs in Miss Desmond's room," answered the girl. "Oh, won't they be glad to see you?"

Phil handed Annie his hat and coat, then ran up the stairs. He had no trouble in finding the room he sought. The children's voices guided him, and the next moment he entered without knocking.

Three screams coming almost simultaniously, greeted him. Those emanating from the children were screams of joy.

But the cry which left Marie's pale lips expressed consternation. She turned her face aside and began to tremble. She was afraid—dreadfully afraid.

"Daddy—daddy!" Harry cried, running forward to meet Gordon.

Phyllis hastily dropped her doll and vaulted into her daddy's out-stretched arm. For a long moment Phil held both of his beloved babies close. They were covering his face with kisses.

In the meantime Marie had managed to regain her composure. She smiled as she met Phil's anxious glance.

Although she still was rather white of face, she looked very lovely. Her wealth of dark hair lying loose among the pillows, made a perfect frame for her sweet face.

"What—what brought you here?" she faltered, a faint blush mantling her cheeks.

"Wait until I get rid of these youngsters, and I'll tell you," he answered. But that was not so easily done. Both, Phyllis and Harry clung to him. Finally he called Annie to take them away.

As soon as he was alone with the governess, he drew up a chair and sat beside the bed.

"Now then," he began, half angry, "why didn't you send me a telegram after this thing happened."

"What happened, Mr. Gordon?" she inquired innocently.

Continued in next number

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